

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE ROCKFORD & INTERURBAN RAILWAY AT SIDING 5, ILL., ON FEBRUARY 22, 1925.

May 6, 1925.

To the Commission:

On February 22, 1925, there was a head-end collision on the Rockford & Interurban Railway at a point known as Siding 5, Ill., which resulted in the death of 1 employee, and the injury of 11 passengers and 3 employees; there is also a possibility that 1 passenger was killed and the body burned in the wreckage. The investigation of this accident was made in conjunction with a representative of the Illinois Commerce Commission.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Freeport-Belvidere Division which extends between Freeport and Rockford, Ill., a distance of 28.9 miles, which in the vicinity of the point of accident is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The point of accident was about 1,000 feet west of the west switch of the passing track known as Siding 5. Approaching from the east the track is tangent for a considerable distance, followed by a 30° curve to the left 2,150 feet in length, the point of the accident being on this curve about 750 feet from its western end. Approaching from the west there are two short curves to the left followed by 292 feet of tangent and then the curve to the right on which the accident occurred. The grade is slightly ascending for westbound trains. The view across the inside of the curve on which the accident occurred is restricted to about 300 feet.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 9.52 a.m.

Description

Eastbound passenger train No. 10 consisted of motor 206, in charge of Conductor Pence and Motorman Chapman. It

left Freeport, 10.5 miles from Siding 5, at 9.30 a.m., on time and was approaching Siding 5, its time-table meeting point with train No. 7, at a speed estimated by the conductor to have been 40 or 45 miles an hour, when train No. 7 was observed approaching from the east, too late to avert the accident.

Westbound passenger train No. 7 consisted of motor 204, in charge of Conductor Berridge and Motorman Rhoades. It left Pecatonica, 3.3 miles from Siding 5, at 9.48 a.m., according to the train sheet, four minutes late, passed Siding 5, practically on time, without stopping, and collided with train No. 10 west of that point while traveling at a speed estimated to have been 30 or 35 miles an hour.

Both cars were of steel-underframe construction, equipped with anti-telescoping buffers, and did not telescope each other. The front ends of the cars, however, were raised in the air until they nearly touched the trolley wire. Fire broke out in the wreckage, apparently due to a short circuit, and the superstructures of both cars were destroyed by the flames. The employee killed was the motorman of train No. 10.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Pence, of train No. 10, said that when about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from Siding 5 he walked ahead into the motorman's compartment and inquired of Motorman Chapman as to which train would enter the passing track at Siding 5, and the motorman was about to answer when Conductor Pence saw the head end of train No. 7, rounding the curve, it being apparently about 250 feet distant. He said Motorman Chapman at once shut off the power and reversed the motors and that he himself unlocked the door on the south side of the vestibule and called to the motorman to jump, at the same time doing so himself. Conductor Pence further stated that on account of the obscured view on the curve he thought train No. 7 was seen as soon as it would have been seen if the weather had been clear.

Motorman Rhoades, of train No. 7, said he did not know that his train had passed Siding 5 until it reached the road crossing located about 700 feet east of the point of accident and that he first saw train No. 10 approaching when it was about 200 feet distant, at which time he reversed the motors without applying the air brakes, thinking that the reversing of the power would have a better effect. He estimated the speed of his train to have been about 30 miles an hour and was unable to give any explanation as to how he happened to pass Siding 5 without stopping.

Conductor Berridge, of train No. 7, in one part of his

statement said he had finished collecting fares from passengers who boarded the train at Pecatonica, had stopped to talk with one of them with whom he was acquainted, and that on looking up he saw train No. 10 immediately ahead, apparently not more than 50 feet distant. In another part of his statement, however, he said he first realized that his train had passed Siding 5, when it reached the crossing which is about 700 feet from the point of accident, and that it was then too late to signal the motorman as the approaching train was right in front of them. Conductor Berridge farther stated that he had not heard the motorman sound the meeting-point whistle signal required by the rules, and his only explanation for not knowing when his train passed Siding 5 was that he was engaged in collecting fares.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by train No. 7 over-running a time-table meeting point, for which Conductor Berridge and Motorman Rhoades are at fault.

Conductor Berridge said he was engaged in collecting fares, while Motorman Rhoades had no explanation to offer. Regardless of weather conditions, there would seem to be no real reason why these employees should not have known when their train passed the switches at Siding 5, had either of them been paying proper attention to the operation of their train.

Had an adequate block-signal system been in use on this line, this accident probably would not have occurred, an adequate automatic train stop or train control device would have prevented it.

The employees involved were experienced men, at the time of the accident they had been on duty about 4 hours, prior to which they had been off duty from 10½ to 15 hours.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. Borland,

Director.